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Davis Families of Students in Grades 3-5:

Tomorrow is the first day of New York State testing for the 2013-2014 school year. State-wide, students in grades 3-8 will open up assessments that are intended to measure their proficiency as readers and writers (ELA) against very challenging state and national standards that New York adopted two years ago (Common Core State Standards, CCSS). Like you will, I'll send my son off to school tomorrow morning with sharpened pencils and words of advice that I hope will help him perform well and stay calm all at once. I have no magic as a parent or a teacher or a principal that I can be sure will accomplish either.

Across New York, educators and parents have raised thoughtful concerns and critiques regarding these assessments and the timeline in which CCSS have been rolled out, combined with the high-stakes testing right away.

The standards are rigorous; these assessments are difficult. However, at some level, if we believe the standards matter and do provide important year-end benchmarks for teachers and for children, it is also important that we measure our work year to year.

The ELA exam requires that students read **CLOSELY** and analyze a variety of text—stories, articles, poems, informational pieces—with great sophistication. Students are expected to read and re-read passages and pay great attention to the **QUESTIONS/TASKS** themselves. Meaning—it is critical that kids spend a great deal of time reading and thinking about the questions they are asked. Our assessments place a great deal of emphasis on students' ability to understand tasks (questions), return to texts they have read, and write crisp, precise short- and extended-responses ***just about the specific questions***. They can picture themselves as literary detectives searching for evidence that will support their writing. Please speak about this at home—children should be reminded to read the questions with great care, and really settle themselves before planning their writing.

Most important, however, is that we together care for the kids' emotions and anxieties. It is OK to be nervous—great athletes get nervous, seasoned public speakers get nervous, you, too, have moments in life/work that produce some stress. We deal with the anxiety as best we can. We can still perform very well in spite of our nerves. Please let your children know that we are here to help them emotionally and make sure they have as good an experience as possible. They will struggle on some passages, feel more confident on others. So be it. The goal is to do their best, as steadily as possible, each morning for the next three days.

Please put your child to bed early tonight. Make an extra special breakfast. Sharpen some extra special #2 pencils that will bring good luck. Tell your children how much you love them and that this is just a test. Remind them that you expect them to work very hard and do their best. **Nothing BAD can come from the results—we will not use the scores for class placement of any kind.**

I know that our teachers and staff will take it from there—we've sharpened some really special #2 pencils, too, and we'll tell them how proud we are of their work, over the next three days, and always.

Sincerely,

Michael Galland